

**Connecticut State Board of Education
Hartford**

The Legislation and Policy Development Committee
Wednesday, January 3, 2024, 8:30 a.m.

Committee Members

Malia K. Sieve, Chair
Karen DuBois-Walton, Donald F. Harris, Bonnie E. Burr,
Elwood Exley, Jr., Martha Paluch Prou

Minutes
(Approved February 14, 2024)

Pursuant to notice filed with the Secretary of the State, the State Board of Education Legislation and Policy Development Committee met in person on January 3, 2024.

I. Call to Order

Committee Chair Malia K. Sieve called the meeting to order at 8:30. In addition to Ms. Sieve, also present at the meeting were Committee Members Karen DuBois-Walton, Donald F. Harris, Elwood Exley, Jr., Bonnie Burr, Martha Paluch Prou, as well as State Board student members Yasmeeen Galal and Connor Cowan. Also in attendance from the CSDE: Charles E. Hewes, Deputy Commissioner for Academics and Innovation; Irene Parisi, Chief Academic Officer; Laura J. Stefon, Chief of Staff; Robin Colombo Cecere, Regional School Choice Office Director; Michael P. McKeon, Director of Legal and Governmental Affairs; and Laura Anastasio, Attorney.

Presenters:

Laura Anastasio, Attorney, CSDE
Dr. Toni Jones, Superintendent, Greenwich Public Schools
Karen Kowalski, Chair, Greenwich Board of Education
Laura Stefon, Chief of Staff, CSDE

II. Approval of Minutes

Being duly moved and seconded, the December 6, 2023, meeting minutes were unanimously approved.

III. Review and Discussion: Greenwich Public Schools Racial Imbalance

Dr. Jones, Superintendent of the Greenwich Public Schools, began her presentation on the Greenwich racial imbalance figures by stating that the numbers had improved each year, but that it is a slow process and will take a few more years. She added that due to the relatively small student population in the affected schools, even small fluctuations in student enrollment can have an outsized effect upon percentages.

Ms. Anastasio inquired about the date of the racial imbalance numbers cited by Greenwich, noting that the numbers were stagnant. Ms. Sieve asked for clarification as to the specific efforts Greenwich is taking to address the racial imbalance, expressing concern that there may be too much reliance upon potential demographic changes in student population rather than an actual, pro-active plan. Such an approach could result in generations of students in racially imbalanced schools. Dr. Jones responded that Greenwich has four magnet schools, the first of which opened in 2000, and since turning Julian Curtiss School into a magnet school, the majority of the students attending have been from more demographically mixed areas.

Dr. Jones cited the difficulty of busing students across town as the impediment to redistricting. The Board keeps the buses off the highway, leaving only one east-west road that is heavily congested. Consequently, middle school students are on the bus for an hour, which the Greenwich Board believes is too long for younger children. Greenwich does not participate in Open Choice, Dr. Jones adding that getting from Norwalk to Greenwich, for example, would pose a difficult trip for students, once again citing the sole, heavily trafficked east-west road traversing Greenwich.

Greenwich is now trying intra-district school choice for those schools that are not magnets. This has resulted in volatility with respect to school attendance as more students than anticipated have shown up in certain schools, and they have had to shift staff among schools to cover the unexpected overages. Complicating matters is that with employees having to return to their respective workplaces, Greenwich has experienced a substantial influx of families due to its proximity to New York City.

The district just began discussions prior to the Christmas break of extending the school days at the magnets, as that may serve as an enrollment incentive to families. Additionally, affordable housing is scheduled to be built in the Glenville section of Greenwich, but that will take a few years to be completed.

Ms. Kowalski discussed the substantial amount of money having been directed to New Lebanon and Hamilton Avenue schools, adding that the instructional staff are equally proficient across the district. She advised that the Hamilton Avenue principal is a “fabulous asset,” having spent most of her life in Greenwich and being very much invested in student performance and outcomes. Dr. Jones added that Greenwich’s Teacher of the Year came from New Lebanon, and that the school’s new principal had been a turnaround principal in the City.

Dr. DuBois-Walton asked about performance comparisons among schools, noting that racial imbalance and student performance are all part of the same equation. Dr. Jones stated that she would have that information for the next meeting with the Committee but referenced scores at the various schools. Dr. DuBois-Walton responded that that the Committee was interested in overall performance rather than simply scores so that it could consider and compare student performance among the various schools. Ms. Sieve added that at the last meeting, the Committee requested such performance metrics. Dr. Jones assured the Committee that the Greenwich Board works diligently to ensure that resources are equitably allocated to all schools. When she first got there, the different schools had different approaches, but now that is no longer the case.

Dr. Jones requested suggestions from the Committee. Ms. Anastasio noted that, ultimately, the demographic of the schools must be changed, whether that be through redistricting or by other means.

Mr. McKeon added that it was the Greenwich Board's, and not the State Board's, obligation to craft an effective remedy.

It is decided that Greenwich will return to meet with the full State Board at the Board's March 6, 2024, meeting.

Ms. Stefon then followed up on the legislative proposals that had been presented to the Committee at its December 6, 2023, meeting, specifically addressing questions the Committee had raised at that meeting regarding the adult-education legislative proposal.

There being no further matters before the Committee, Dr. DuBois-Walton moved, and Ms. Burr seconded, a motion to adjourn. The motion passed unanimously, and the meeting adjourned at 9:25.